

I add to the G and F are the only clues I leave. No one will notice my subtlety, my feeble desire to be caught. My carving is a time capsule staple, an archaeological discovery. With such responsibility I must be careful. If the others return before I finish I must ignore their distractions. If they do not return at all I must carry my work to a safe place, guarding it from the flames or high water.

## SHOES

I am wearing these shoes too much, I know. They cling to me as if longing for a heaven I might provide. When I sleep they muddy the sheets, causing my wife anguish. She does not recognize their desperate faith, sees only the tenacious nuisance. When I reach for her she is disturbed; her legs are covered with bruises. If questioned, she explains about frequent low tables and corners of beds. My shoes harass her, disliking her embarrassment. Winter is coming; already the slush drips onto the sheets. Each night when I remove the shoes I believe I will leave them on the floor. Each night I remove my socks and put the shoes back on. I cannot leave them; they nearly sigh when our skins touch. They are happy, I know, and I am happy as well, feeling their warmth in the night.

## STEAK DINNER

A dog stands at attention.

Some master beckons, expecting an answer.

The bone offered is eaten by an intruder who runs toothless to safety, sweeping all crumbs with the speed of his tail.

It is a vacuum growing naturally that threatens. It is an order ignored that brings the shocked look to the unwary.

The ownership of cattle, the production of beef has leaped toward the glory of a steak browned over charcoal and the Sunday smoke, the reminder of approaching work.

All of the diners must sleep at last regardless of their appetites. They must forget their taste of the warm meat, remembering in their sleep the cold final bite, the grease hardened into white scum.

## SUSPENSION

Accustomed to surprise, I did not speak when the shift occurred.

It was as though the creek was above the ground, levitated somehow. The bridge remained stationary, its ordinary posture now grotesque. Being intact was no longer sufficient.

A crowd appeared, of course. It grew quickly, filling the bridge. When it became obvious that nothing else would happen, a restlessness moved through the people. Someone threw stones upward, trying to see if they would splash. When the stones returned completely dry, the crowd decided the vision was a fraud, that the empty bed beneath them was the result of a hastily constructed dam upstream, that the water was someone's idea of a joke.

Nevertheless, it remains above me. No one has discovered the humorist.

## THE SHALLOW CASE

Think of the shallow case. It can hold little that you cannot imagine.

Think of the smooth leather surface and the slight click as it opens. You will not be surprised by the sheaf of papers, the brief portfolio.

If removed, however, they leave behind a space you can step into, bringing a friend, finding room you cannot fill. This case is not meant for wading. A small misstep and you may sink rapidly, fading from sight, forgotten, closed and locked away in some musty closet.

-- Gary Fincke

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